PACKAGING®

THE CAHNERS MAGAZINE FOR DECISION-MAKERS/FEBRUARY 1992

WHAT'S THE Rx FOR SUCCESS?

Retailers Say The Package Can Help Or Hurt

WHAT WILL TASTE BEST? It depends on the packaging See page 62

Food Marketers Seek Better Organoleptics

Line Managers Face Challenge Of Worker Training

New Products Debut At EastPack '92, Interphex USA

SPECIAL SECTION: Plastics Recycling

PACKAGING

A CAHNERS PUBLICATION
VOLUME 37 NUMBER 2

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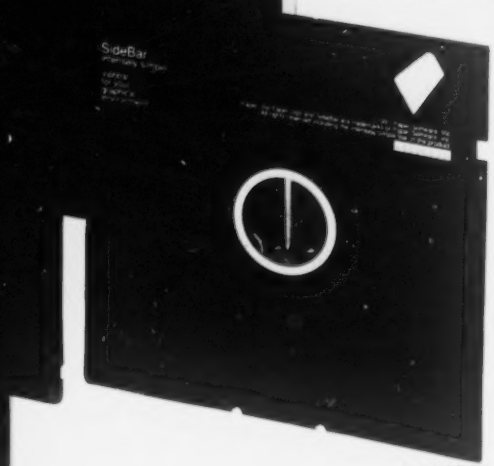

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NEXT MONTH

Dress up that bottle! Could your plastic bottle use some flair? Color it, pearlize it, clarify it—and watch sales perk up.

How to put converter expertise to work. Got a great new product, but don't know how to package it? Check out converter "partnering."

Adhesive applicators stick to the task. Sift-proof carton sealing profits from pinpoint accuracy and the latest electronic versatility.

COMING SOON

✔ Packaging is increasingly becoming a global business with barriers crossed by truly international brands. We'll present reports from a dozen foreign countries including the U.K., France, Germany, South Africa and Australia.

✔ Co-packing Windex refill pouches for Drackett is only the latest—and boldest—in a series of successful projects for contract packager Marietta Corp.

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Visiting the shows? Look here for attendee information and a product preview. Page **71**

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Expectations rise to Oct. '91 levels

Kermit Baker
Chief Economist
Cahners Economics

The PACKAGING Magazine Business Confidence Index shot up in January. The rebound comes after four straight monthly declines and brings the index near its October 1991 level.

The vantage point of a new year may have had some impact on the improvement in business confidence. More likely, though, businesses are reacting to the dramatic decline in interest rates over the past month.

A good sign from the third quarter of 1991 was 3.8% rise in corporate profits. Profit increases, of course, lead to increases in marketing and capital spending.

Another positive note was stabilization in inventories. After declines since the end of 1990, businesses apparently felt that inventories were down to what appeared to be appropriate levels. Any increase in demand can be translated directly into increased production.

Gains in business confidence in the packaging field follow patterns seen in every business sector, region and function. The improvement supplies a piece of hard evidence that a manufacturing recovery can be expected to begin in early to mid-1992, pushing packaging demand up.

A healthy dose

Overall, this month's survey uncovered a healthy dose of optimism in the business community. Like last summer, though, businesses are unlikely to continue spending unless end-market demand follows closely.

Public expectations for the future did not follow the same path as business in January, although expectations for the future are much more positive than opinions about the present situation.

The overall Consumer Confidence Index (1985=100), which measures opinions about both the present situation and expectations, dipped from 52.5 in December to 50.4 in January.

Expectations rose in December to 72.6, then dipped in January to 69.2. According to the Conference Board, less than 19% of Consumer Confidence Survey respondents believe business conditions will be "better" by summer.

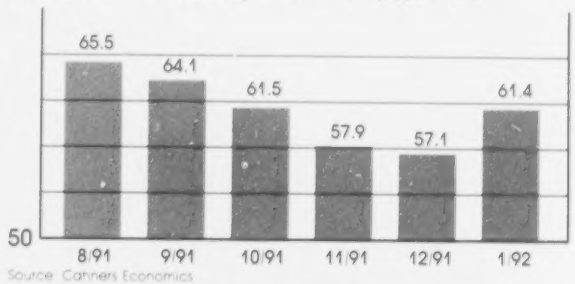
But consumer demand accumulated during pessimistic times will eventually reach the marketplace and boost the recovery . . . provided consumers are convinced that times will get better.

If businesses begin to act as their confidence suggests, the consumer may be more confident of employment opportunities and security, creating higher expectations for the future.

Research assistance:
Lori Brassaw, Economist
Cahners Economics

BUSINESS CONFIDENCE TAKES A BIG JUMP IN JANUARY

After four months of declining expectations, respondents to the PACKAGING Business Confidence Index survey in January 1992 report growing optimism. Note: Any number over 50 reflects more optimism than pessimism.



Source: Cahners Economics

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DEVELOPING SKILLED LABOR FOR THE FUTURE

The recession forced labor cutbacks on your packaging line. Now you're gearing up. How will you find and train operators to run your advanced machines?

Lisa McTigue Pierce
Associate Editor

Strange as it may seem at a time like this in America's economic history, good workers are hard to find.

Day after day during the recession, headlines told us of layoffs by the thousands. You'd think that the ranks of the unemployed would contain any number of workers who would make a valuable addition to your packaging operation now that you're planning to staff up. In fact, that isn't so.

A competent, efficient staff is especially critical during periods of growth. With so many people out of work, finding a warm body to stand around on your line will be easy. But finding someone with the necessary skills and knowledge to help you raise productivity won't be.

The best computer yet

Today's packaging machines are more sophisticated, integrating technological advances such as computer-control and built-in diagnostics.

Two beliefs clash on the effects of this technology:

- Because machines are more sophisticated, packaging lines require fewer but more highly skilled operators.
- Packaging machines are so smart that anybody can run them.

The second statement is true, says David Sandahl, practice leader for Kepner-Tregoe, a management consulting firm, "when the machine works as designed." But, he adds, "When there's a deviation, you're much better off if your work force is highly skilled. Human beings still have the best computers going."

Consultant Bob Luciano expresses a similar view, "You can train someone to set up a line with standard numbers, but materials aren't all the same. The machine has to be tweaked. It's very difficult to teach someone to tweak it. Learn how to spread out the skills of people. After the operators set up the line, have a master technician check their work."

Suppliers are quick to point out the timesaving benefits of their systems. Machines with computer diagnostics and pre-programmed setup can cut downtime—as long as operators understand how to communicate with them.

Manufacturers of programmable controllers, for example, realize the necessity of a user-friendly operator/computer interface.

Touch screens are continuing the evolution of operator-interface technology. Also on a packager's wish list: better graphics and color for displaying messages and alerts, smaller devices, ergonomic buttons or switches and native-language support as markets become more global.

Erasing the line

Packaging machinery technology is advancing so fast that simply investing in the newest systems is not enough to stay competitive.

To keep a step ahead, companies must invest in their people-based technology,

SOMEONE TO TURN TO

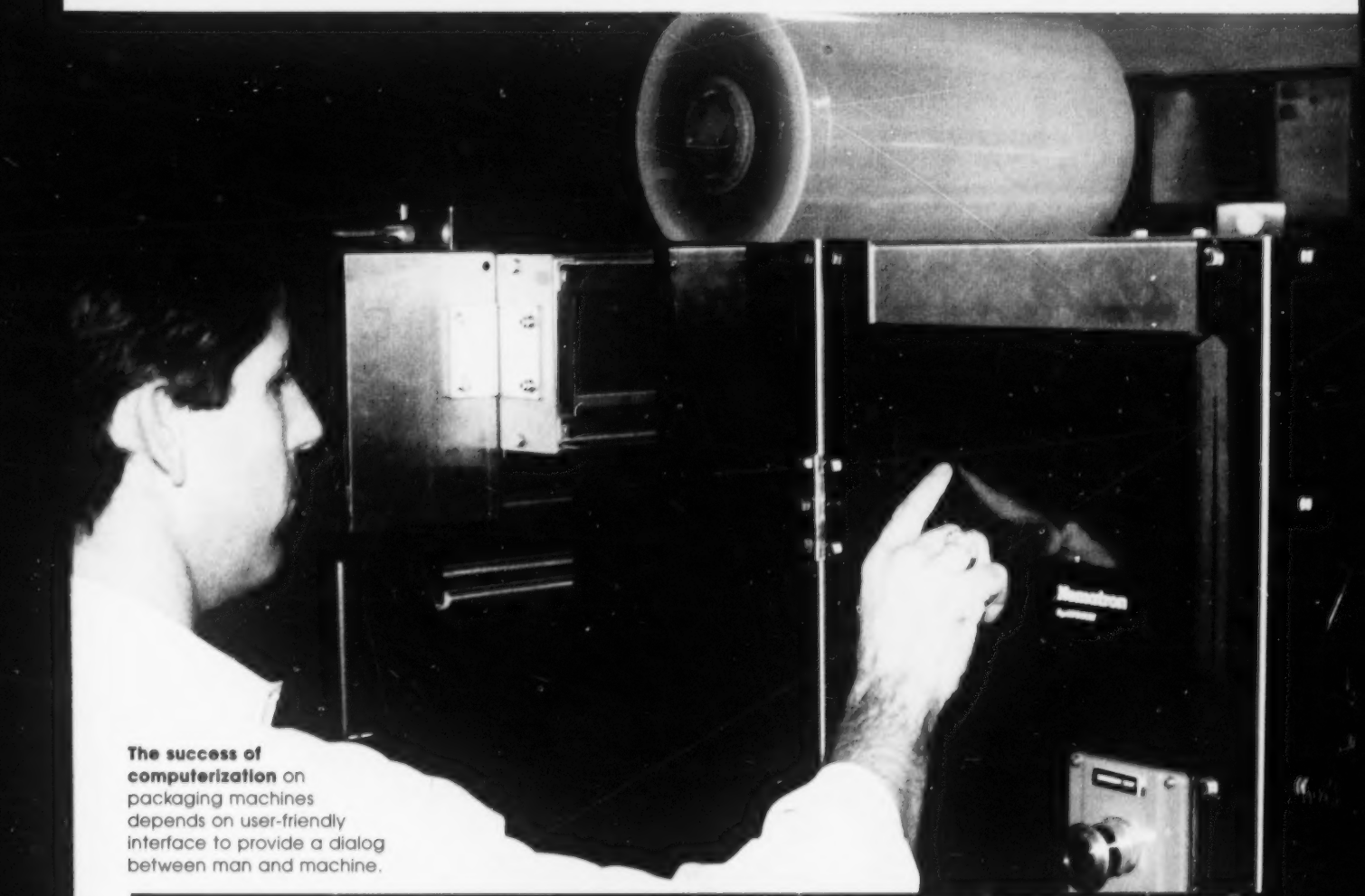
Managers are responsible for making sure operators and mechanics keep lines running at top efficiency. But it's not necessarily the manager's job to do the teaching.

One option is to set up a training program with a local school. The Packaging Machinery Manufacturers Institute has helped establish programs with colleges in various parts of the U.S.

Another alternative is to find an existing in-plant training program that you and your line personnel can follow. PMMI publishes 21 self-instruction courses on packaging machinery training which cover topics such as the basics of mechanics and troubleshooting skills.

According to PMMI, key to the success of its program is that "the self-instructional format allows each trainee to progress at his or her own best pace, moving rapidly through familiar material and concentrating on the areas in which more instruction is needed."

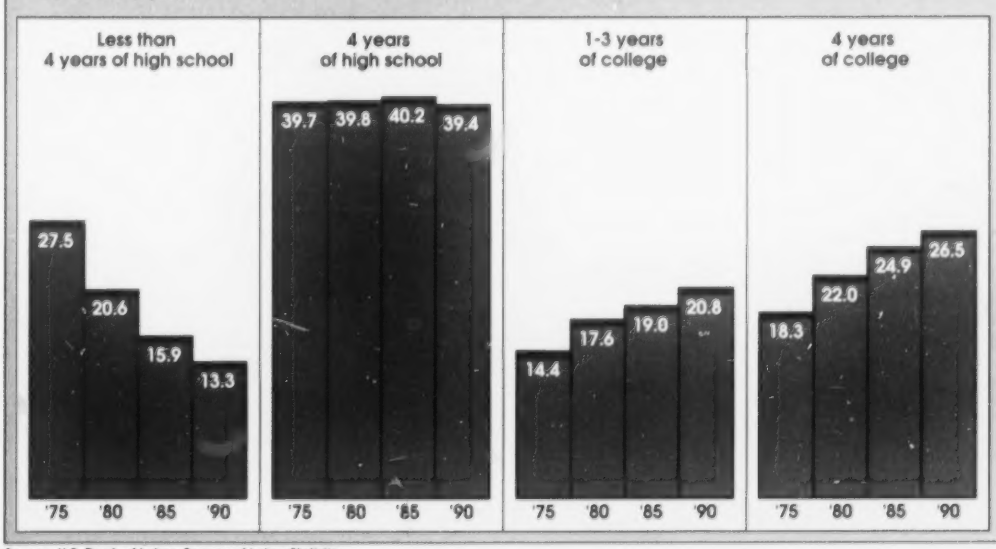
For more information on PMMI's training courses or about programs at local schools, circle **530** or contact Glenn Davis, director of training and education at PMMI, Wash., D.C.



The success of computerization on packaging machines depends on user-friendly interface to provide a dialog between man and machine.

HIGHER EDUCATION MEANS SMALLER MANUAL-LABOR POOL

The percentage of workers aged 25 to 64 with some college education has risen steadily over the past 15 years while the number of workers without a high-school diploma has dropped more than 14%. More-educated Americans are believed to be less interested in blue-collar jobs.



Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

'Human beings have the best computers going'

says Sandahl. "The pace of improvement on technology is so fast that tomorrow you may not be obsolete, but you will be a step behind."

Advances in packaging machinery are *reshaping* rather than eliminating specific duties on the line. Magazines still need to be filled; knobs have to be turned; moving parts must be lubricated.

In the past, packaging-line workers fell into one of three job levels: machine operator (relatively low-skilled); line supervisor to oversee and troubleshoot the line (medium skill level) and line mechanic (highly skilled).

Today the line between job responsibilities is getting thinner and even being erased. Companies want operators who can run the line, fine-tune the machines and repair minor problems.

"You cannot afford to have workers wait until a mechanic comes in," says Sandahl. "Think of the difference between a two-hour, four-hour or eight-hour delay in production vs. your workers fixing the line in 20 minutes."

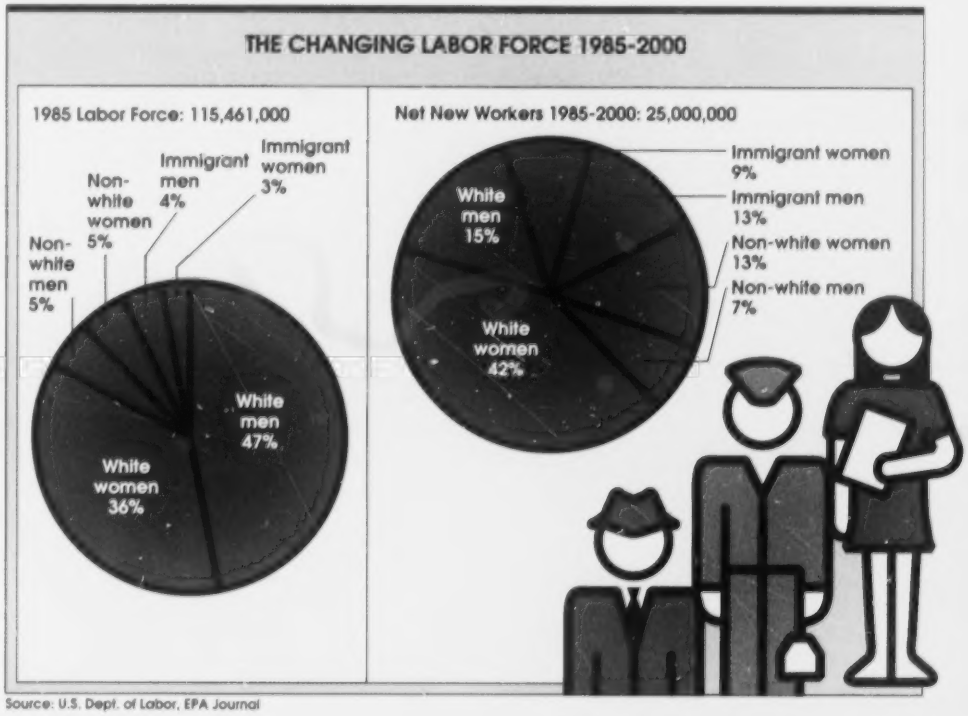
Glenn Davis, director of training and education at the Packaging Machinery Manufacturers Institute, agrees. "When the line goes down, the operator who puts it back up becomes a very important aspect of the chain," he says.

Luciano describes how recent trends support this idea. "The team approach has changed a lot. Everybody on the line is being trained to do any job on the line," he says. "It's forcing things like user-friendly machines."

Workforce 1992

Packaging operations are being affected by changes in the overall job market. According to *Workforce 2000*, a report prepared by the Hudson Institute for the U.S. Dept. of Labor, three major trends will have an impact on the workforce of the future: a growing need for educated workers, a higher proportion of women and minorities entering the labor pool and a marked decrease in the number of young workers.

A recent article in the *EPA*



Source: U.S. Dept. of Labor, EPA Journal

AGRESSIVE TRAINING PROGRAM SPARKS ENTHUSIASM, LOYALTY

The benefits of establishing a training program far outweigh the essential investment, says David Namowicz, president of Warren Industries, a contract packager in Racine, Wis. In an interview with PACKAGING, he explains how well his company's customized training program works.

Q: ***What kind of training program do you have?***

A: We have two types of training. We train a key person to provide on-the-job training for other workers.

We also have a teacher come in from a local technical school to give a course geared to our people. It's a classroom setup here in our building. Classes are at the end of the shifts so it's easy for people to attend. We also pay them for their time during the training and even bring in pizza every so often.

We tried sending them to school campuses but the dropout rate was too high.

Through this program, our workers earn technical-school credits. Besides mechanical abilities, we teach our workers how to be a team. We even provide classes for General Equivalency Diplomas (GEDs).

Q: ***Why establish in-plant training?***

A: Simply to guarantee the company's future. It's very hard to find skilled labor with good work ethics. The schools have failed, so we have to find people who have a good work ethic and then teach them the way we want them to be taught. Of the 32 mechanics that we have, only two or three were hired [as mechanics]. The rest we trained.

Because we're a smaller company, we can't compete with high benefits, so right away I lose the good people to the big guys.

Q: ***How does the training effect pay?***

A: We pay the workers more after they're trained, either at their annual review or because of a promotion. During the review, we also tell them what they can do in the future to increase their pay and improve their position.

Q: ***How does the company benefit?***

A: The cost of training is very low compared to the benefits. We've invested about $50,000 on education for our workers. That's cheap compared to hiring "head hunters" to find good people.

Our people see room for progress within the company and they seem to feel a sense of loyalty to us for giving them the training.

People come out of the class with so much enthusiasm. That's an intangible that we can't ignore—the enthusiasm. They give their best because they appreciate what we do for them.

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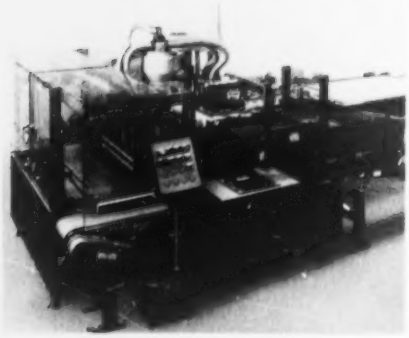

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• Automates Bag Packing

This unique top-load case packer uses a robotic cell to pack non-uniformly shaped bagged products such as candy and snack foods at speeds up to 120 per minute. The unit automatically corrects side-leading "skews" up to 30° as they enter the system.

Cases are one- to two-lane divided and surged against a line stop, then brought into position adjacent to the robotic cell for loading. The end-of-arm tooling on the cell picks up the correct layer count/pack pattern from the product infeed conveyor when accumulated and places it in the case. When the desired pack count is achieved, the filled case is indexed away from the load station for sealing.

For more information, contact Thiele Engineering Company, 7225 Bush Lake Rd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55435, 612/835-2290.

For information circle 30

'The cost of training is low compared to the benefits'

Journal discusses the ramifications of an aging workforce:

"While a more mature labor force has many positive attributes, one issue is clear: There will need to be additional training of individuals in the workforce to compensate for a lack of incoming qualified entrants."

This is no news to Davis, who is responsible for putting together training programs for PMMI. (See sidebar.)

"There is no foreseeable improvement in the labor situation because very little is being done to increase the pool of skilled workers," Davis says. "The demand is so large that there's no chance it will be met. As industry expands, more lines are put into operation. This expansion more than covers the reduction in the number of jobs because machines are more sophisticated and easier to operate."

The solution is not magic, just elementary: Take worker training seriously.

"It may be harder with some people more than others, but everyone can learn additional skills," Sandahl says.

Back to class

Training can take several forms.

- In-plant training, either classroom-style or hands-on
- Operator and troubleshooting training from suppliers on specific systems, especially during new installation
- Computer training systems tailored to your needs
- Mechanics training classes at a local technical school or community college
- Management consultants who teach theoretical problem-solving techniques

The chosen method may change for each situation. What's clear is that you must take control of training your present workforce to plan for the future.

A short-term Catch-22 is that a training program designed to boost productivity can initially add to overhead because your newly skilled workers deserve a higher salary.

The problem is in thinking short-term. Investment in worker training undoubtably, unequivocally produces a positive effect on profits long-term.

From bulbs to bags to bromides,

"If you give people a clear idea of what needs to be done, give them the skills and motivation, there's no limit to the contribution they can make," says Sandahl. "Part of being world class is having a world-class labor force." ■

Our thanks to the following sources for contributing to the factual content of this article: Allen-Bradley, Bureau of Labor Statistics, R.A. Jones & Co., Kepner-Tregoe, Luciano Associates, Omron Electronics, Packaging Machinery Manufacturers Institute and Warren Industries.

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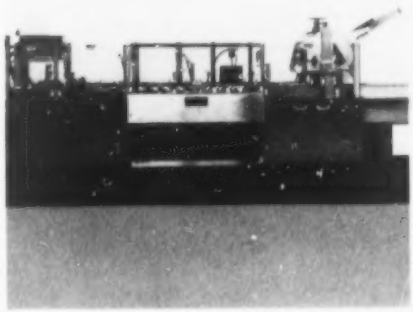

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For more information, contact Thiele Engineering Company, 7225 Bush Lake Rd., Minneapolis, Minn. 55435, 612/835-2290.

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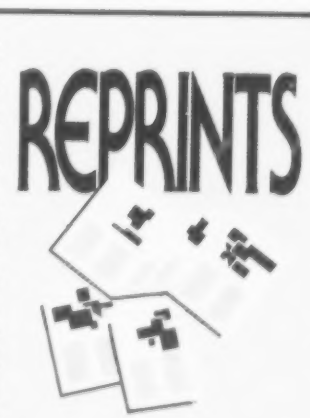

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